

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWS LETTER

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SPRING, 1961

**EZRA STILES—18TH CENTURY
CONGREGATIONAL CLERGYMAN**

PROFESSOR EDMUND SEARS MORGAN OF YALE UNIVERSITY

When Ezra Stiles graduated from Yale in 1746, he defended, as his part of the Commencement program, the thesis that the authority of hereditary kings does not proceed from divine right. This was a proposition that would have been familiar to the seventeenth century. It had been proved on the scaffold in 1649, and New England still believed it in 1746.

Three years later, when he appeared for his Master's degree, Stiles offered a valedictory oration in which he apostrophized liberty in terms that ring more of the eighteenth century, terms which might not have been understood by the men who cut off King Charles's head a hundred years before. "Tis Liberty, my friends," he exclaimed, "tis the cause of Liberty we assert — a freedom from the Biass of a vulgar eduction, and the violence of prejudicate opinion — a liberty suited to the pursuit and enquiries after truth — natural and moral." Stiles at this time was undergoing a flirtation with deism and was soaking himself in the writings of the Enlightenment. When he finally merged from this period with a new evangelical faith in Christianity, he retained as heritage of the Enlightenment a profound belief that reason is the only way to truth.

This belief remained with him throughout his life. After moving to Newport he heard that President Clap had removed from the Yale Library the Sermons of Dr. Clarke, one of the books responsible for his own brief fall into deism. His response was to urge Clap to restore the book and let truth find its way in the liberty of the open market. "It is true," he wrote, "with this liberty error may be introduced; but turn the tables, the propagation of truth may be extinguished. Deism has got such head in this age of licentious liberty, that it would be in vain to try to stop it by hiding the Deistical Writings: and the only Way left to conquer and demolish it, is to come forth in the open Field and dispute the matter on an even Footing."

As President of Yale Stiles never faltered from this belief. As he grew older he became, not more conservative, but more liberal. The American Revolution gave tremendous impetus to his development. Hitherto he had thought the best possible type of government was a constitutional monarchy of the British type, and like other Americans he opposed British taxation as a violation of the liberties which the constitution guaranteed all British subjects. By 1776 the spirited resistance of the Americans had filled him with a new vision of republican liberty. He saw now that freedom could never be wholly safe under a monarchy, that the future would witness death-struggle between republican liberty on the one hand and monarchy on the other. And he had no doubts whatever as to which side would be victorious.

(From the Historical Address given by Prof. Morgan, at the Annual Meeting, April 14, 1961)

Providence Plantations

Host to Historians

The ninth annual luncheon and business meeting of the Congregational Christian Historical Society was held April 14 at Providence, R. I., in the meeting house (1810) of the Beneficent Church (1743), Rev. Arthur E. Wilson, minister. The complete records of the church have been carefully preserved since its gathering in 1743. The Rhode Island Conference has forty churches of which twenty-three have historians, a percentage unequalled by any other conference.

At a special symposium for historians held at 10:30 A.M. the leaders were Dr. Thomas R. Adams, librarian of the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, and Professor Harland E. Hogue, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California.

Head table guests included speakers and their wives who were introduced by the society president, Superintendent James F. English, Connecticut Conference. Grace was said by Superintendent R. Vernon Lawson of Rhode Island, and a welcome was extended by the host minister, Dr. Wilson. After the luncheon, greetings were brought from the General Council by Rev. Albert C. Ronander, from the Home Boards by Rev. Edward A. Powers, and from the Historical Society of the Southern Convention by its president Dr. H. H. Cunningham of Elon College. Messages were read from Mrs. Frederick L. Fagley, Dr. David Dunn, president of the E & R Historical Society, Rev. Frank M. Weiskel, minister of First Church in Newton (1664), a governor of the society, and from Dr. Ralph F. G. Calder, minister of the International Congregational Council, London.

The formal program was held in the beautiful meeting house of Beneficent Church, redecorated last year for its sesquicentennial observance. The members were led in the singing of Psalm 23 from the Bay Psalm Book by Mr. Ronander who after the manner of our fathers lined out the verses. The guest of honor was Professor Edmund Sears Morgan of Yale, who mounted the high white pulpit and read a scholarly and absorbing address on Ezra Stiles — 18th Century Congregational Clergyman, who became the seventh president of Yale College in 1778. This vigorous and versatile man was an outstanding figure of his time, whose varied interests included the law, astronomy, silk culture and the whereabouts

of the ten lost tribes of Israel. His biography by Dr. Morgan will be published in the fall by the Yale University Press.

The business meeting was opened with prayer by Rev. Arthur H. Bradford, former president of the society. Routine reports were made by the several officers, and new developments noted in the preparation of monographs for our twentieth century leaders, and the collection of union data. Forward looking recommendations concerning the important work and outreach of the society were presented by the executive committee and approved. A budget of \$10,000 was adopted.

Superintendent Cornelius E. Clark of the Maine Conference, chairman of the nominating committee, presented the list of governors and the slate of officers which were duly elected; president, James F. English; vice-presidents, Fred Field Goodsell and Mervin M. Deems; librarian, John A. Harrer; treasurer, James H. Lightbourne, Sr.; executive secretary, Vaughan Dabney, and research secretary, Miss Carrie Powell; clerk, J. Allyn Bradford. The executive committee consists of the officers with the addition of Miss Helen Kenyon, Albert J. Penner and Clifford O. Simpson.

The necrology named governors who had died since the last annual meeting — Charles C. Merrill, elder statesman, William E. Lowry, retired Boston businessman, and Edward C. Sayler, dean of Yankton College School of Theology. Prayer was offered by President English.

One hundred and one governors, officers and member historians from nine states attended the meeting. Local exhibits included rare documents, valuable old church records and the pulpit Bible used by Ezra Stiles in his Newport Church. The historical society displayed the original pencilled minutes of the Oberlin Council of 1871 with a framed photograph of that assembly.

The decennial of the society will be celebrated at Andover Newton Theological School, April 27, 1962, when Rev. Fred Hoskins will deliver the Andover Southworth Lecture on Congregationalism. Other important parts will be taken by Rev. Arthur H. Bradford, Rev. Richard M. Fagley and Rev. Douglas Horton. The addresses will be published in the seminary quarterly, edited by Professor Samuel MacLean Gilmour. The society faces its tenth year of service to the churches with courage and hope, ready for future tasks and duties.

CONCERNING THE LOCAL CHURCH HISTORIAN

Note: It is not to be expected that the historian then first appointed will attempt all the duties stated herewith, but will consider which of these suggestions, that have come from historians, may appropriate for the particular church.

1. The Church Historian should be elected by a responsible church body, assigned specific duties and be given a modest expense budget. He should seek close cooperation with the pastor and church clerk. In some churches the same person assigned the duty of clerk and historian.

2. Careful personal preparation is essential. The historian should know the history and publications of the Conference, the national agencies, the Boards, also the News Letter, and United Church Herald and have a denominational history.

3. Old diaries, histories and documents should be collected and deposited for safekeeping with the Congregational Christian Historical Society or one of the denominational depositories. Record should be compiled of persons who have interesting historical documents, books, and heirlooms in their possession.

4. If there is a church library it should be supplied with books on our denominational history. The reading of church history should be encouraged and assistance given to high school and other students who may be writing on an historical topic.

5. Town and State libraries and historical societies should be cultivated and supplied with copy of the local church history, the State Conference paper, and United Church Herald.

6. A brief chronological record should be kept of interesting events as they occur, and a scrap book or carefully indexed folders should be kept for pictures, newspaper clippings relating to the church, its organization, its members, special programs of interest, published material by the pastor or other members; also photos of significant groups carefully preserved for future celebrations, with names and dates properly noted.

7. A file with copies of (1) circular letters to members, letters from absent members; (2) reminiscences by older members concerning people and events of the past; (3) State Conference paper and programs of special interest. A special file of Sunday church bulletins should be kept.

8. The historian should maintain close relationship with the national Congregational Christian Historical Society, create interest in it so the church maintain membership in the Society, and nominate interested individuals for membership. Secure copies of the News Letter and literature table.

9. The historian should attend Association, Conference and other church meetings when possible, and should send items of interest to the State Conference paper and local papers. Serve all such published notices.

10. For Forefathers' Day and other anni-

versaries adequate time should be taken for careful preparation and literature secured. While the pastor or a special committee will usually be in charge of such celebrations, the historian should always be ready to render such service as may be desired. The historian should keep a careful record of the preparation for the program of such anniversaries and a complete file of all published materials.

11. The report. A brief report may be made at an annual meeting if and when special events occur, as anniversaries, new buildings, new organizations formed, changes of pastorates, ordinations, and participation in community and denominational affairs.

PREPARING FOR A CHURCH HISTORY

The history of a church is a recital of how a group of people have over the years united to worship God, to train their families in Christian teaching and action, to enrich the life of the community, and to further the kingdom among people near and far.

That the history may be a worthy record requires that attention be given to the people who through the years have contributed thought, activity, and resources for the development and maintenance of the church. To this end a careful gathering of material is necessary. From our experience we find churches seeking their lost records in these and other categories:

1. When, where and by whom was the church founded? Where is the record preserved?
2. What buildings have been erected, where, when, pictures, story.
3. What ministers have served the church? Name, education, other pastorates, photo, notes as to service, results of the pastorate, standing in the community, in the fellowship.
4. Persons who have gone from the church into life-long religious, educational or social welfare work, with brief biographical notes.
5. Participation of the church or its members in denominational life, delegates to church meetings, members of boards and agencies, entertainment of Association, Conference and other denominational agencies, with record of missionary and benevolent contributions year by year.
6. Participation of the church or its members in community enterprises, local benevolent and educational institutions, inter-church affairs, public office held by members, and participation in political and economic life.
7. (a) Action taken by the church relating to questions of public welfare or social issues, local, state, national.
(b) Relationship to local schools, teachers, School Board members, P.T.A.
8. Records of previous celebrations or anniversaries, dedication, re-dedication, and of hospitality given to Association, Conference and other organizations.

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The Officers together with
Helen Kenyon, Conn.

Committee

Albert J. Penner, Mass.
Clifford O. Simpson, Conn.

The Budget of the Society

A budget of \$10,000.00 was adopted at the Providence Annual Meeting as necessary and possible goal to reach by 1962 when we celebrate our decennial. This is a challenge to loyal members and friends of the Society.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY

April 27, 1962

Andover Newton Theological School,
Newton Centre, Massachusetts

Main speakers include Rev. Fred Hoskins, Rev. Douglas Horton, Rev. Richard M. Fagley and Rev. Arthur Bradford.

This decennial observance will provide opportunity for recalling the brief history of our own organization and remembering the life and labors of our founder and first secretary, Frederick Lewis Fagley. Further details later.

Save the date, April 27, 1962.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

James F. English	James H. Lightbourne	Vaughan Dabney
President	Treasurer	Secretary

14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass.

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President
JAMES F. ENGLISH

Vice Presidents
MERVIN M. DEEMS
FRED FIELD GOODSELL

Treasurer
JAMES H. LIGHTBOURNE

Clerk
J. ALLYN BRADFORD

Organized October 15, 1952

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14 BEACON STREET
BOSTON 8, MASSACHUSETTS

VAUGHAN DABNEY, Executive Secretary

*Executive Committee
Officers and
HELEN KENYON
ALBERT J. PENNER
CLIFFORD O. SIMPSON*

*Librarian
JOHN A. HARRER*

SEPTEMBER 1961

To the Ministers and Members of the Congregational Christian Churches

Dear Friends:-

This society, founded nine years ago, has already made a place for itself in the life of our fellowship. It has stimulated interest in the search for and care for important historical records. It has been of assistance to church historians and has demonstrated the importance of writing the story of churches while it is being told.

We wish that all of you could be present at the annual meetings of the society. Here a lively company of interested people gather each year to share experiences and to learn how they can help others to appreciate and preserve our priceless inheritance.

It appears to many of us that with the coming of the United Church of Christ it is even more important that we show a practical appreciation of the past and that we make every effort to see to it that the records of present happenings are carefully preserved.

For these and all the other reasons often repeated we come to you again for your financial support of this society. Our tenth year budget is \$10,000. Seventy-five percent of it should come from individuals, conferences, and associations. We believe that it is important that each church and minister contribute to the support of the society.

Therefore if you have not made your contribution for 1961, please do so promptly. And if you have helped the cause this year may we count on you to keep up the good work in 1962? Please understand that the measure of the extent and usefulness of this venture depend upon the support which it receives.

We will welcome suggestions and comments on our program and hope that you receive, read and enjoy the News Letter. Your officers are eager to make this society a source of increasing usefulness to our ministers and churches.

Faithfully yours,

James F. English

James F. English
President

the CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Organized October 15, 1952

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BOSTON 8, MASSACHUSETTS

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